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RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0611
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 4253
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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SUBJECT: THE 2010 COLOMBIAN ELECTIONS PROCESS

REF: BOGOTA 2625

¶1. Colombia has entered into the 2010 election cycle. National legislative elections to replace the entire Senate and House ("Camara") are scheduled for March 14 and presidential elections are scheduled for May 30. Departmental (state) and local elections will take place in ¶2011. All elections are for four-year terms.

¶2. Following is a timeline for the 2010 national legislative and presidential elections:

2009

Sep. 15: The last day to switch parties before the elections
Sep. 27: Three parties hold internal primaries to select presidential candidates and some congressional candidate lists
Nov. 30: Deadline for sitting President (Uribe) to declare his candidacy
Dec. 15: Deadline for registration of independent presidential candidates (Note: This is earlier than the deadline for candidates representing previously registered parties.)

2010

Jan. 29: Formal start of presidential campaign season
Feb. 2: Deadline for registering congressional candidates
Mar. 12: Deadline for registering presidential candidates from previously registered parties
Mar. 14: Congressional elections
Mar. 16&21: Tallying of Congressional votes
May 30: Presidential and vice-presidential elections
May 31-June 1: Counting of votes for President
Third week in June: Second round of presidential elections (if necessary)
July 20: First day of new Congress (Senate and House)
Aug. 7: Presidential inauguration

¶3. To be elected President in the first round, a candidate must obtain at least 50% of the vote -- a difficult feat when there are numerous candidates. If there is no victor in the first round, a face-off between the top two vote-getters is held three weeks later in June.

¶4. One hundred senators are elected nationally, with each voter voting for one senator. Two additional senators are elected from indigenous communities, bringing total Senate size to 102 senators. Each department (state) elects two House (Camara) representatives, plus an additional number of representatives depending on each department's population.

Again, each voter votes for only one House candidate. Voters also elect additional House representatives for special seats: two reserved for Afro-Colombians, one for indigenous communities, one for Colombians abroad, and one for political minorities (the top vote-getter among parties that did not win a House seat). There are currently 166 total House seats. For the first time, "combined lists" grouping congressional candidates from more than one party in loose coalitions will be permitted.

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